

Sacred Stories

A Living Commentary on American Jewish History and the Hebrew Bible

BEHA'ALOTKHA MAY 25, 2013

Where Do You Belong?

By Rabbi Brad Hirschfield



Artifact:

Poster, United War Work Campaign, ca. 1918

National Museum of American Jewish History

Peter H. Schweitzer Collection of Jewish Americana

Located on the wall next to the World War I case on the third floor

Where Do You Belong?

Sacred Stories **BEHA'ALOTKHA**

Where do you belong? What communities are you a part of? How do you know that you really are a welcome member of any group, be it your family, your nation, your church or synagogue? Those questions are always relevant, but perhaps never as poignant as when a nation goes to war.

As you look at the striking poster inscribed with the words, "United Behind the Service Star," note that the organizations listed range from Jewish to Evangelical Christian to Catholic. Seven distinct banners carried by seven different people, all united in a common cause – all simultaneously part of different communities and one greater community. That understanding of belonging is what allowed this ad campaign to be as successful as it was.

"There shall be one law for you, whether stranger or citizen of the country."

For the first time in centuries, the bonds of belonging to a single nation, America, were so strong, that this poster's message resonated with Jews and other religious minorities. We were one nation composed of many kinds of citizens, all ready to unite in support of those who served our nation.

Nowhere as they had in America did Jews, not to mention so many other immigrant minorities, experience this kind of access and equality. While it was not perfect, and remains less than perfect for some groups in this country still, it was unprecedented. It was a system which promised, in the words of the Hebrew Bible, Numbers 9:14, "There shall be one law for you, whether stranger or citizen of the country."

The poster before which you stand could only work if it were read by people who felt sufficient inclusion and equality that they could see beyond the religious and cultural differences which otherwise differentiated them. They could unite in support of all those in service, regardless of religious difference because at some level, all those in service were all theirs. Why? Because they felt largely welcomed by a system which treated each “them” as part of “us.” That is the standard for any great nation, be it biblical or contemporary.

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, President of Clal, has been ranked several years in a row in Newsweek as one of America’s “50 Most Influential Rabbis,” and recognized as one of our nation’s top “Preachers & Teachers,” by Beliefnet.com.

ARTIFACT

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About this partnership:

Both the Jewish People and the United States of America are rooted in a quest for greater freedom and human dignity. Inspired by this parallelism, the National Museum of American Jewish History is collaborating with Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and its Rabbis Without Borders program to launch a new initiative, **Sacred Stories: A Living Commentary on the Hebrew Bible and American Jewish History**.

Sacred Stories weaves together Judaism's foundational sacred text, the Torah, with one of the most successful expressions of freedom in human history, the story of Jewish life in America. **Sacred Stories** explores our shared values by linking these two vital and compelling stories through contemporary commentary and 21st century media.

The **Torah** is a central feature of Jewish tradition. Used to refer generally to Jewish wisdom, it also refers specifically to the 5 Books of Moses which makes up the Hebrew Bible. A portion of the Torah text, a **Parsha**, is read on **Shabbat** (Sabbath). The whole Torah is read sequentially over the course of the year. Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest and begins on Friday evenings and ends Saturday night. Many Jews observe Shabbat to emulate God's resting on the seventh day of Creation. The fourth commandment is to keep Shabbat holy which Jews do with festive meals, resting, and learning.



The National Museum of American Jewish History, on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, presents educational programs and experiences that preserve, explore and celebrate the history of Jews in America. Its purpose is to connect Jews more closely to their heritage and to inspire in people of all backgrounds a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish experience and the freedoms to which Americans aspire.



Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership is a think tank, leadership training institute, and resource center. Bringing Jewish insights to a wide American audience, Clal makes Jewish wisdom an accessible public resource. A leader in religious pluralism, Clal builds bridges across communities to encourage diversity and openness. Linking Jewish texts and tradition with innovative scholarship, Clal promotes Jewish participation in American civic and spiritual life, reinvigorating communities and enhancing leadership development.